



Presbytery of San José

September 18, 2026

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

This Monday, September 21, the presbytery observes the International Day of Peace. Our denomination has a longer history with that work than most of us realize, as Presbyterians have been present at the United Nations since its founding in 1945. Our Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., carries those same convictions to our own capital, and the PC(USA) holds founding memberships in a number of ecumenical councils. One of those is the World Council of Churches, on whose governing board and executive committee our own Executive Presbyter, the Rev. Dr. Neal Presa, represents the PC(USA) as we strive for peace in the many places of war and conflict around the world. It is a good reminder that when the Church speaks of peace, it is not speaking abstractly.

Closer to home, this Saturday Veronica Ota will be ordained to the ministry of peacemaking and justice — a role our presbytery created because the need was already before us, and so was the person called to meet it. Alongside that ministry, Veronica will guide Watsonville's new worshipping community, "Good Growth Gardens." The vision is for an intergenerational, inclusive space that nurtures faith and community alongside food and nature, and runs parallel to other neighborhood efforts taking shape on the church property, including Westview's ongoing housing initiative, "Hope Village."

The prophet Jeremiah told a people far from home to plant gardens and to seek the welfare of the city where they found themselves. It is not complicated advice — it just asks for patience. In the weeks ahead, allow yourself the same grace and patience that you give to others in your daily ministry.

Regards,

Colin Richardson

Communications and Executive Support Associate

colin@sanjosepb.org

#CalledToCommunity

#CommittedToJustice

IN THIS ISSUE

A quick look at this week's news, events, and opportunities.

FEATURED

NEAR Gathering IV

Next Saturday – Sept 26 · Gilroy

Presbyterian Church — Keynote Speakers &
Discussion on Christian Nationalism ·

ADVOCACY

ICE OUT Prayer Vigil

Sept 26 · 2pm · Following NEAR Gathering,
at the proposed ICE detention site in Gilroy.
More details to come.

Immediately Followed by Prayer Vigil (See
Peace & Justice Section)



MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT

Northern CA Asian PW Pres: Gathered In Faith | Fall 2026

Oct 17 · Trinity Pres. Church (San Carlos) ·
Special Guest – Dr. Yoko Barraca
[See Flyer Here](#)



UNITY CANDLE

Trinity Pres. Church & Urban Works Santa Cruz

Sunday, Sep 20 · Rev. Diane Ford



PRESBYTER REMINDERS

PSJ Fall Clergy Retreat: "Pits & Falls" | Oct. 28–29

October 28 – 29 · St. Francis Retreat Center ·
San Juan Bautista, CA
[Register Now](#)

EP ON THE ROAD

Attending & Participating in Ordination of Veronica Ota | Sep. 19

Ordination at 2:00 pm · First Pres. Church of
Altadena · Presbytery of San Gabriel

EP's Upcoming Travels & Preaching/Speaking

September 19: Attending and Participating in ordination of Veronica Ota - First Presbyterian Church, Altadena, Presbytery of San Gabriel

September 26: NEAR Gathering IV - Gilroy Presbyterian Church (9:00am-1:00pm)

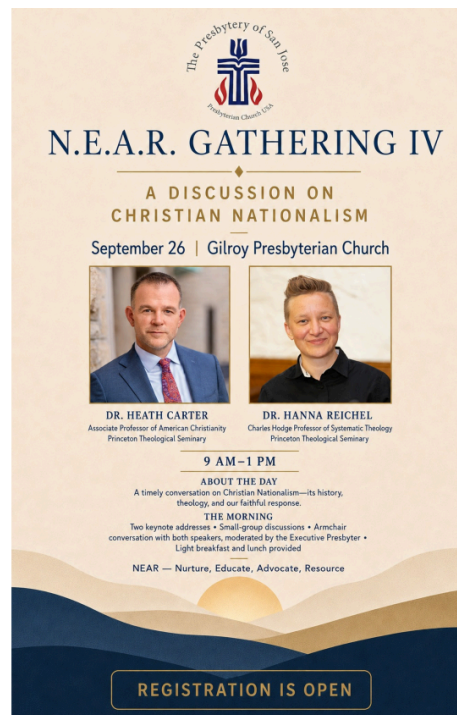
October 4: Preaching at First Presbyterian Church-Mountain View (10:00am); Attending retirement of The Rev Dennis Woodsmall at First Presbyterian Church-Santa Clara (12:00pm)

October 11-14: Mid-Council Leaders Gathering at Presbyterian Center; Louisville, KY

October 14-16: Auburn Theological Seminary board of directors at New York City

If you would like to invite the EP to guest preach, facilitate a class, lead a retreat, help with strategic visioning/planning, or grab a cup of coffee, email neal@sanjosephby.org or call/text (408) 763-5004.

Featured



***NEAR Gathering IV: Saturday, September 26
Gilroy Presbyterian Church | 9:00am–1:00pm
Keynote Speakers & Panel Discussion***

The Presbytery of San José's fourth N.E.A.R. Gathering will take place on Saturday, September 26, 2026 (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) at Gilroy Presbyterian Church, 6000 Miller Ave., Gilroy, CA 95020. This year's gathering is centered around a pressing and timely theme: Christian Nationalism. Guest speakers from Princeton Seminary will deliver keynote addresses and take part in a sit-down discussion with EP Neal Pesa. Light breakfast and lunch provided. This event is made possible by the Synod's Anne Penke fund.

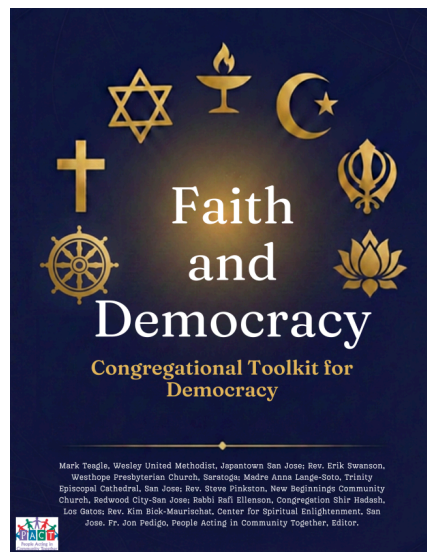
Following the Gathering, our Peace and Justice Working Group invites you to a prayer vigil at the proposed Gilroy ICE processing center. We will meet in the church parking lot at 1:30 p.m. to carpool to the site for a brief vigil from 2:00 to 2:30 p.m. We need God and we need each other in this moment, and those who are detained — and those who fear it — need our solidarity. Reach out to Veronica@sanjosephby.org with questions, comments, or concerns.

Your Input Shapes Next Year's Meeting Schedule

For the past two years, our presbytery has gathered under an alternative format: a mix of Zoom and in-person business meetings alongside our in-person *NEAR* (Nurture, Educate, Advocate, Resource) gatherings. As we prepare recommendations for 2027 – and consider whether to keep suspending our current standing rules – the Rev. Bryan Franzen, chair of the Polity & Government Subcommittee, and Stated Clerk the Rev. Dr. Grace Kaori Suzuki have put together a short survey to hear from you.

If you are an active member of the Presbytery of San Jose, please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire below. We ask that you complete it by Monday, September 28, so your responses can inform the Coordinating Council's October 1 meeting. The Council will then settle on the right mix of in-person and virtual business meetings and announce the 2027 schedule at our Called Meeting on Thursday, November 5. How we gather shapes how we serve one another in the year ahead – thank you for lending your voice.

TAKE THE SURVEY → forms.gle/Zntr3uUT6A8aPSuY9



New Resource:

Faith & Democracy Congregational Toolkit

The Rev. Erik Swanson, the social justice committee at Westhope Presbyterian Church in Saratoga, and their interfaith partners have authored "Faith and Democracy: Congregational Toolkit for Democracy." Built as four self-standing modules, it walks a group through how our democracy works, the challenges facing it, what it means to be an informed voter, and practical next steps a congregation can take together. With the midterms approaching, it is a ready-made tool for sessions, adult education classes, and small groups looking to stay informed and engaged.

View and download the resource at the link here:

[Faith & Democracy Congregational Toolkit](#)

From the Executive Presbyter:

A Reflection on Gathering, Published by New College Berkeley

At the invitation of New College Berkeley's executive director, Craig Wong, EP Neal Presa has a new reflection published by NCB, now available to read. Titled "**Gathering as a Countervailing Act**," the piece reflects on a three-day retreat this past Juneteenth in Daly City that brought together leaders from Asian American and Latinx churches — including our own Stated Clerk, Rev. Dr. Grace Kaori Suzuki.



Following the retreat, participants walked two miles to a Filipino American Church of the Nazarene in Daly City for a panel discussion with African American leaders, where representatives of all three communities shared how they have come to integrate Christian faith with ancestral heritage, and the difficulty of doing so in predominantly White spaces. We commend it to you at the link below:

newcollegeberkeley.org/blog/2026/8/27/gathering-as-a-countervailing-act

Unity Candle □

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20



Trinity Presbyterian Church & Urban Works Santa Cruz Santa Cruz

This week, we invite you to pray for Trinity Presbyterian Church of Santa Cruz and their pastor, the Rev. Diane Ford, as they continue their faithful witness as an open and affirming community of faith.

Trinity describes itself as both traditional and progressive, not as opposites but as companions. The congregation has roots that extend back to 1938, and their ministry has always been grounded in shared commitments to "honesty, kindness, justice, and deep respect for the image of God in every person."

Trinity's life together shows up in the ordinary rhythms of a week. A book club has met continuously since 1987, gathering the third Monday of each month in the Fireside Room. The Chancel Choir rehearses Sunday mornings at 9:00, moving between classical, jazz, and contemporary repertoire and welcoming new voices whenever they arrive. On Wednesday afternoons, Shower the People brings hot showers to neighbors without housing right there in the church parking lot, and the Sweet Pea quilters make quilts for children at the Homeless Family Shelter. It is a congregation that holds prayer, potlucks, and practical care as one piece of work.

This week's Unity Candle is co-hosted by Urban Works Santa Cruz, a ministry partner supported by Trinity. Under Creative Director the Rev. Ryan Althaus, Urban Works uses art and recreation to break through faith, social, and economic barriers, building a more diverse and unified community alongside adults with disabilities. Weekly offerings include art sessions, yoga and dance, and roller skating open to people of all abilities, along with workshops and recreational gatherings that support participants and their families.

We invite our presbytery members to pray for Rev. Althaus and the leadership of Urban Works as they continue to create opportunities for inclusion and spiritual impact.

For more information about this week's congregation(s), visit the links below:

[Trinity Presbyterian Church of Santa Cruz](#) | [Urban Works](#)

To follow the path of our Unity Candle, visit the link below:

<http://tinyurl.com/SJUnity2025>

This Week

Mission & Outreach Update: Available Funding for Mission Projects

The Mission and Outreach Working Group (MAOWG) still has grant money available to help fund your mission projects. If your mission committee is interested in applying for a grant, please go to our presbytery's website, click on the "Forms" tab, and fill out the grant application for the Mission and Outreach Working Group.

Grant applications are due no later than December 1. If you have any questions, please contact the MAOWG Chair, Pam Siu, at: thesiufamily@yahoo.com. Your mission work is important to us and we are here to help!

Rev. Ryan Althaus · Hunger Advocate



Inclusive Cabin Camping Adventure October 2–4 | Yosemite, CA ADA-Accessible Excursions Through Urban Works

Urban Works is again partnering with Camp Krem Yosemite in Ahwahnee, CA, for a weekend of cabin camping just outside Yosemite National Park. Expect ADA-friendly hikes in Yosemite Valley, two nights in accessible cabins, healthy meals, campfire evenings, and plenty of good company. No prior hiking or camping experience is needed, and transportation is provided thanks to Shared Adventures.

No prior hiking or camping experience is needed, and the Urban Works team is familiar with a wide range of accessibility needs. For registration and pricing information, visit the link here: urbanworks-sc.org

For questions, contact Ryan Althaus at ryan@sanjosephby.org.

Pieces on Peace ☮

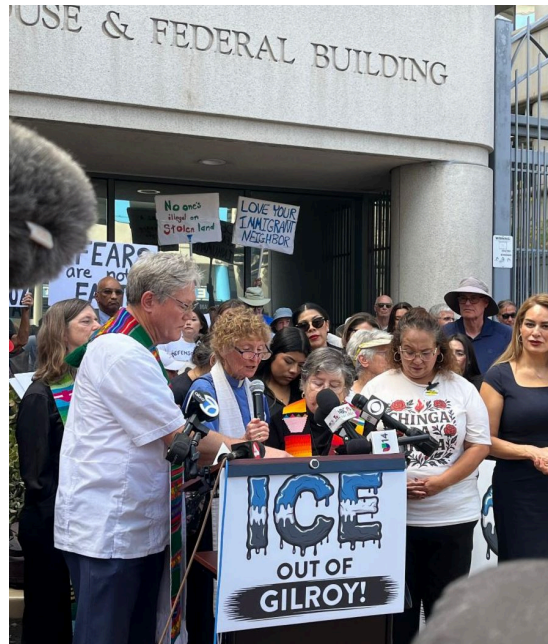
SEPTEMBER EDITION

Veronica Ota · Peacemaking & Justice Advocate

On Tuesday, September 8, a large crowd rallied outside of the Federal Courthouse in San Jose, awaiting an update on the temporary injunction that paused construction on the ICE detention processing center in Gilroy. There were faith leaders from various traditions; local politicians representing Santa Clara and neighboring counties; and representatives from groups like ICE Out of the Bay, Amigos de Guadalupe, PACT, SIREN, cultural groups representing people with Japanese and Filipino backgrounds; and many more. We were a diverse group, but our chant rang true: “The people united, will never be divided!” A formal decision has yet to have been issued, but it seems very likely the judge will order a continued pause on construction, which is good news for the moment.

As a *yonsei* fourth-generation Japanese American, when I participate in these rallies, protests, and vigils against ICE detention, I wonder to myself – who was there protesting when my grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ generations were being rounded up and sent to detention centers? Who prayed for my family when they were behind barbed wire fences? What concerns me about the current situation is that people are not only being rounded up and confined, but it is happening in **private**

detention centers. People, actual people who exist behind the elusive idea of the “corporation,” are **profiting** from separating families and locking people up in deplorable conditions. (You might be one of those people, depending on your investment portfolio. Have you checked?) People are profiting on the outside while people are dying on the inside.



Speaking in the photo above is our own Rev. Dr. Diana Gibson, Pastor Emerita of First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, joined by Madre Anna Lange-Soto, an Episcopal priest, and Father Jon Pedigo of People Acting in Community Together (PACT) Santa Clara. Rev. Erik Swanson and Rev. Hardy Kim of the Presbytery of San José were also among the clergy who took part in the courtroom discussion.

As Christians we are called to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, do justice and love mercy. Whatever our political leanings, we need to come together as people of faith to figure out how to intervene when undocumented immigrants are being dehumanized as quota numbers and line items in profit margins in an industrialized prison system. We cannot turn a blind eye to a broken immigration system that routinely abuses the most recent rounds of newcomers to this country.

I invite you to join our Peace and Justice Working group for a **Prayer Vigil after our upcoming NEAR Gathering on Saturday, September 26, at the proposed Gilroy ICE processing center.** We will gather at 1:30pm in the Gilroy Presbyterian Church parking lot to carpool to the site for a brief prayer vigil from 2 – 2:30. We need God and we need each other in this moment, and people detained and those who fear it need our solidarity. More information on the vigil will be circulated. Reach out to Veronica@sanjosephby.org for questions, comments, concerns.

Presbyter Reminders

***Leaders of Color '26:
Building Resilience Through Spiritual Practice
Zephyr Point | October 19 – 22***

Registration is now open for this year's Leaders of Color Retreat (Clergy and Commissioned Ruling Elders/Commissioned Pastors included). The annual gathering will be co-facilitated with the Presbyteries of San Francisco, Redwoods, and North Central California.

This year's gathering, "Building Resilience Through Spiritual Practice," will be facilitated by The Rev. Dr. Ruth T. West, Associate Dean at San Francisco Theological Seminary and an ordained PC(USA) Minister of Word and Sacrament and Spiritual Director. With experience in spiritual direction, trauma care, and dismantling systemic racism, Ruth brings a rich perspective to this year's gathering.

Visit the link below for event, payment, and subsidy information. RSVP by September 30.

Register at the link here:

forms.gle/cndzSRknXwVEBNKu9



Fall Clergy Retreat | Oct. 28–29
Theme Announced: "Pits & Wells"
St. Francis Retreat Center | San Juan Bautista



Pastors and ministers of our Presbytery are invited once again to step away for rest and renewal at this year's Clergy Retreat, October 28–29, 2026, at St. Francis Retreat Center in San Juan Bautista. This year's gathering, themed "Pits and Wells," will be guided by spiritual director Rev. Fred Harrell, who serves as transitional pastor of Stone Church – Willow Glen. Additionally, the time will allow for fellowship and peaceful study in a picturesque setting.

Overnight registration (\$100) includes dinner on October 28 and breakfast and lunch on October 29; commuter registration (\$50) is also available for those joining for the day. Register now the form here: forms.gle/7C8kKeWsUVQ9QhiG6

Checks should be made payable to the Presbytery of San José and mailed to the Presbytery office. For questions or inquiries, contact EP Neal Presa at neal@sanjosepy.org



Stewardship Kaleidoscope Conference 2026
Cultivate Generosity & Leadership Practices
September 21 – 23 | Baltimore, MD

Registration is now open for Stewardship Kaleidoscope 2026, an annual ecumenical conference taking place from September 21–23, 2026, in Baltimore, Maryland. Drawing participants from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and other ecumenical partners, the conference features informative workshops, plenary speakers and networking opportunities aimed toward expanding leadership skills and cultivating stewardship in congregations.

Whether you are a pastor, ruling elder, stewardship committee member, finance leader, or anyone passionate about generosity in the life of the Church, Stewardship Kaleidoscope offers practical tools and fresh ideas to bring back to your congregation. Registration information is available here: stewardshipkaleidoscope.org/registration/

The Presbytery of San Jose will cover the conference registration fee for those interested in attending. Those seeking financial assistance with travel and lodging expenses are invited to submit a sponsorship request to EP Neal Presa at neal@sanjosepby.org.

Employment Opportunities



The Presbytery and its partners/affiliates are always hiring. Visit our Employment Opportunities page or read about new opportunities below from congregation and Presbytery-affiliated organizations:

Stone Church of Willow Glen

- [Family Ministry Assistant Director](#)

First Congregational Church of San Jose (UCC)

- [Assistant to Interim Minister](#)

First Presbyterian Church of Snohomish (Washington State)

- [Installed Pastor](#)

Urban Sanctuary San Jose

- [Part-Time Lead Pastor](#)

[VIEW ALL POSITIONS](#)

www.sanjosepby.org

[View as Webpage](#)

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